

In 2010, there were an estimated

45.9 million =

adults aged 18 or older in the
United States with any mental illness.*



"Because of strong family support, I was able to leave the hospital system fairly quickly and begin slowly rebuilding my life."

ORYX COHEN

Technical Assistance Center Director, National Empowerment Center
Lawrence, MA

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FAMILIES AND FRIENDS CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE

For millions of people, a solid support system is essential for recovery from a mental and/or substance use disorder. People of all ages who have behavioral health conditions are just like those with other treatable conditions – deserving of empathy, compassion, and respect.¹ Encouragement from peers, loved ones, colleagues, and the community where they live can have a significant impact on people's overall health and well-being in recovery.

The 23rd annual **National Recovery Month (Recovery Month)** observance this September will celebrate the effectiveness of treatment services and the reality of recovery. **Recovery Month** is sponsored by the **Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)**, within the **U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS)**.

This year's theme, **"Join the Voices for Recovery: It's Worth It,"** emphasizes that while the road to recovery may be difficult, the benefits of preventing and overcoming mental and/or substance use disorders are significant and valuable to individuals, families, and communities. People in recovery achieve healthy lifestyles, both physically and emotionally, and contribute in positive ways to their communities. They also prove to family members, friends, and others that prevention works, treatment is effective, and people recover.

Recovery Month aligns with SAMHSA's **Recovery Support** Strategic Initiative, which partners with people in recovery and family members to promote individual, program, and system approaches to building recovery and resilience. Family and friends make a difference by offering support, reassurance, companionship, and emotional strength. They share the message that treatment and recovery support services are available and help their loved ones find a recovery program that meets their individual needs.

This document provides tips for recognizing the signs of a behavioral health condition and encouraging a positive change in the life of someone you know, while learning ways you can cope with your loved one's condition.

Recognize Mental Health Problems and Offer Your Support

While most people believe that mental health problems are rare,² these conditions are, in fact, common. Remember that you are not responsible for and did not cause the mental or substance use disorder of a family member or friend. You can help your loved one by recognizing the signs of mental health problems, which vary by age group, so you can be alert to any changes in behavior:^{3, 4}

- **Young children:** Changes in school performance; poor grades despite strong efforts; excessive worry or anxiety; hyperactivity; persistent nightmares; persistent disobedience or aggression; and frequent temper tantrums.
- **Older children and pre-adolescents:** Substance use; inability to cope with problems and daily activities; changes in sleeping and/or eating habits; excessive complaints of physical ailments;

defiance of authority; truancy, theft, and/or vandalism; intense fear of weight gain; prolonged negative mood, often accompanied by poor appetite or thoughts of death; and frequent outbursts of anger.

- **Adolescents:** Feelings of sadness, hopelessness, or worthlessness; prolonged grief after a loss or death; excessive feelings of anger or worry; alcohol or drug use; exercising, dieting, or binge-eating obsessively; hurting others or destroying property; doing reckless things that may result in self-harm or harm to others.
- **Adults:** Confused thinking; prolonged depression (sadness or irritability); feelings of extreme highs and lows; excessive fears, worries, and anxieties; social withdrawal; dramatic changes in eating or sleeping habits; strong feelings of anger; delusions or hallucinations; growing inability to cope with daily problems and activities; suicidal thoughts; denial of obvious problems; numerous unexplained physical ailments; and substance use.

If your friend or family member tells you that he or she has a mental health condition, the following tips can help you offer support:⁵

- Express your concern and support;
- Ask about how he or she is managing;
- Ask what you can do to help;
- Offer to help your loved one with errands or everyday tasks;
- Reassure your loved one that you care about him/her; and
- Find out if the person is getting the care that he or she needs and wants.

Recognize Substance Use Disorders and Offer Your Support

Like mental health conditions, substance use disorders affect families of every race, ethnicity, socio-economic status, and location. The following are signs that a friend or family member may be abusing drugs:⁶

- **Physical signs:** Bloodshot eyes or pupils larger or smaller than usual; changes in appetite or sleep patterns; sudden weight loss or weight gain; deterioration of physical appearance or personal grooming habits; unusual smells on the breath, body, or clothing; and tremors, slurred speech, or impaired coordination.
- **Behavioral signs:** Drop in attendance and performance at work or school; unexplained need for money or financial problems; engaging in secretive or suspicious behaviors; sudden change in friends, favorite hangouts, and hobbies; and frequently getting into trouble (fights, accidents, illegal activities).
- **Psychological signs:** Unexplained change in personality or attitude; sudden mood swings, irritability, or angry outbursts; periods of unusual hyperactivity, agitation, or giddiness; lack of motivation; appearing lethargic; and appearing fearful, anxious, or paranoid, with no reason.

When offering support to someone with a substance use disorder, refer to the following tips to guide the conversation.⁷

- Express your concern and provide examples of ways in which the person's substance use has caused problems;
- Don't cover up or make excuses for substance use-related accidents or occurrences;
- Intervene as soon as possible after a substance use-related incident, when the individual is no longer under the influence;

- Gather information on treatment options and offer to accompany the person to the first appointment or meeting; and
- Recruit other friends, family members, or people in recovery to deliver the message that help is available and treatment is effective.

Most importantly, remind these individuals that recovery is possible, and that millions of people just like them were able to regain their lives and live healthy, rewarding lives in recovery.

Mental and/or Substance Use Disorders Affect the Whole Family

Individuals with mental and/or substance use disorders aren't the only ones whose lives are impacted by these conditions. These disorders affect family members and friends emotionally, physically, spiritually, and economically. The following tips will help you cope with changes in your life:^{8, 9}

- Set limits, roles, and boundaries;
- Develop a coping strategy;
- Accept your feelings;
- Support recovery;
- Simplify your approach by setting small goals; and
- Sustain your own physical, mental, and spiritual health.

When family members and friends are involved and supportive of a person seeking treatment for substance misuse, the likelihood of success is improved.¹⁰ You can work toward making things better for yourself and also increase the chances of your loved one reaching and maintaining recovery.

Additional Recovery Resources

A variety of resources provide additional information on **Recovery Month**, mental and/or substance use disorders, and prevention, treatment, and recovery support services. Use the toll-free numbers and websites below to share your experiences, learn from others, and seek help from professionals. Through these resources, individuals can interact with others and find support on an as-needed, confidential basis.

- **SAMHSA Website (<http://www.samhsa.gov>)** – Leads efforts to reduce the impact of mental and/or substance use disorders on communities nationwide.
- **SAMHSA's National Helpline, 1-800-662-HELP (4357) – or 1-800-487-4889 (TDD)** – Provides 24-hour, free and confidential treatment referral and information about mental and/or substance use disorders, prevention, and recovery in English or Spanish.
- **SAMHSA's "Find Substance Abuse and Mental Health Treatment" Website (<http://www.samhsa.gov/treatment>)** – Contains information about treatment options and special services located in your area.

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GROW

Friends And Family

- **SAMHSA's "Considerations for the Provision of E-Therapy" Report** (<http://store.samhsa.gov/shin/content/SMA09-4450/SMA09-4450.pdf>) – Shares extensive information on the benefits, issues, and successes of e-therapy.
- **SAMHSA's ADS Center** (<http://www.stopstigma.samhsa.gov>) – Provides information and assistance to develop successful efforts to reduce prejudice and discrimination and promote social inclusion.
- **National Association for Children of Alcoholics** (<http://www.nacoa.net>) – Advocates for the public awareness, education, and support of children whose parents suffer from substance use disorders.
- **National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence, Inc. (NCADD)** (<http://www.ncadd.org>) – Offers assistance to individuals, parents, youth, and friends and family of those who are fighting alcoholism and drug addiction.
- **National Suicide Prevention Lifeline, 1-800-273-TALK (8255)** – Provides a free, 24-hour helpline available to anyone in suicidal crisis or emotional distress.
- **Teen Challenge International** (<http://www.teenchallengeusa.com>) – Provides youth, adults, and families with effective and comprehensive faith-based solutions to life-controlling alcohol and drug problems.

For a longer version of this guide, please visit <http://www.recoverymonth.gov>, locate the "**Recovery Month Kit**," and click on the "**Targeted Outreach**" link. Information about treatment options and special services in your area can be found by calling **1-800-662-HELP (4357)** or 1-800-487-4889 (TDD), as well as at <http://www.samhsa.gov/treatment>.

Inclusion of websites and resources in this document and on the *Recovery Month* website does not constitute official endorsement by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services or the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.

Sources

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